DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 123 PS 024 740

AUTHOR	McBride, Brent A.; Rane, Thomas R.
TITLE	Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-PS-96-10
PUB DATE	Oct 96
CONTRACT	93002007
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Early Childhood Education; Father Attitudes; *Fathers; Males; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; Parent Responsibility; *Parent School Relationship; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Given the support for increased involvement of parents in their children's schooling and the positive contribution men can make to children's development, it is important to reach out specifically to fathers or other significant males in parent involvement efforts for pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs. This digest discusses barriers to male involvement, including: (1) fathers' fears of exposing inadequacies; (2) ambivalence of program staff members about father involvement; (3) gatekeeping by mothers; and (4) inappropriate program design and delivery. The digest also offers the following suggestions for educators who are planning initiatives targeted at men: (1) be specific about goals; (2) acknowledge resistance to initiatives; (3) identify significant male role figures; (4) provide training and support services for staff; (5) train female facilitators to accept male involvement; (6) do not neglect mothers; (7) go slowly; and (8) do not reinvent the wheel. (LPP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 400 123

ERIC • Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

University of Illinois • 805 W. Pennsylvania Ave. • Urbana, IL 61801-4897
(217) 333-1386 • (800) 583-4135 • ericeece@uiuc.edu

ERIC DIGEST
October 1996 • EDO-PS-96-10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs

Brent A. McBride and Thomas R. Rane

Parents, educators, researchers, and policymakers all assert the value of positive home-school partnerships. This focus on parental involvement in school settings comes at a time when early childhood programs increasingly consist of children from single-parent households, recombined or blended families, foster-parent homes, extended families with relatives, or a variety of other family situations (Epstein, 1988). A major challenge for family support professionals working in early childhood settings is to restructure program policies and practices aimed at increasing parent involvement to reflect the new realities of family structure, lifestyle, and ethnic characteristics. This effort is crucial as an increasing number of states and local public school systems move toward offering pre-kindergarten programs for children from economically disadvantaged and "high-risk" backgrounds (Karweit, 1993).

Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood Settings

An important yet often overlooked strategy in the effort to increase parent involvement in early childhood programs is involving fathers or other significant male role figures. The notion that all fathers of children from low-income and high-risk backgrounds absent themselves from child rearing is a myth that permeates program development efforts in this area. For example, in a recent study of a pre-kindergarten at-risk program, McBride and Lin (in press) found that a majority of the mothers surveyed reported their children had regular and consistent interaction with a father or other male role figure despite the high proportion of single-parent families being served by the program. In a nationwide survey of Head Start programs serving low-income families, Levine (1993) found that a man is present (whether the father, mother's boyfriend, or other male relative) in approximately 60 percent of Head Start families. Furthermore, in a similar nationwide survey of Head Start programs, Gary et al. (1987) found that the majority of parents and staff members felt that emphasis should be placed on getting Head Start fathers involved in the program.

The myths and stereotypes surrounding men in low-income and high-risk households have had a significant negative impact on policies relating to programs that benefit disadvantaged families (Levine, 1993). Generally these policies identify "parents" as targets for their outreach initiatives, yet program implementation typically discourages the participation of men in parent involvement activities. The lack of initiatives designed to encourage male involvement in pre-kindergarten programs for children who are at risk for later school failure does not build upon the strengths that many of these men can bring to the parenting situation—strengths that can be utilized in the development of effective home-school partnerships. When men become actively involved, they can have positive impacts on many aspects of children's development (see Lamb, in press, for a comprehensive review).

Getting Fathers/Males Involved

Given the support for increased involvement of parents in their children's schooling and the positive contributions men can make to their children's development, it is important to reach out specifically to fathers or other significant males in parent involvement efforts for pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs. In doing so, however, it is important to recognize at the outset that several barriers must be overcome in order to successfully get men more involved. Levine (1993) has outlined four factors that constrain Head Start and state-funded pre-kindergarten programs from encouraging father involvement: (1) fathers' fears of exposing inadequacies; (2) ambivalence of program staff members about father involvement; (3) gatekeeping by mothers; and (4) inappropriate program design and delivery. Each one of these barriers must be overcome as programs attempt to encourage and facilitate increased involvement of fathers in their children's school experiences.

McBride and his colleagues (McBride, Obuchowski, & Rane, 1996) have identified several key issues that need to be explored as early childhood programs struggle to build stronger home-school partnerships through the development and implementation of parent involvement initiatives targeted at men.

1. Be Specific about Goals

Early childhood educators need to be specific in their reasons for developing parent involvement initiatives targeted at men. Prior to developing such initiatives, educators must ask themselves why they think such efforts are important and how they can enhance the services being provided to children and families. There are clear benefits to encouraging male involvement in early childhood programs for enrolled children, their families, and the programs in general. Focusing on male involvement because it is currently a "hot" social issue increases the likelihood that such efforts will wane when the next big issue emerges.

2. Acknowledge Resistance to Initiatives

Not everyone will be committed to the concept of parent involvement initiatives targeted at fathers or other significant males. The lack of male involvement and "responsible"

PS 024240

fathering behaviors is often cited as a major reason for children's later school failure, and many people will question why resources should be targeted at these men when they are viewed as the primary cause of the problems facing children. This resistance may come from mothers, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders. Since support from these groups is critical to the success of parent involvement initiatives designed for men, educators will need to build a strong rationale for developing such initiatives, a rationale that can be clearly articulated to these groups in order to gain their support for such efforts.

3. Identify the Significant Male Role Figures

Educators will need to be specific about whom to target in their efforts to encourage male involvement. Research data have indicated that children growing up in low-income and single-parent homes often have regular and consistent interactions with a father figure, although not necessarily their biological father. Focusing efforts on biological fathers will exclude a large proportion of men who play significant roles in the lives of these children. The key for educators will be to identify who the men are in the lives of these children who can then become targets for these efforts.

4. Provide Training and Support Services for Staff

Most early childhood educators have received little, if any, formalized education and training in the area of parent involvement. This is especially true in the area of male involvement in early childhood programs. If such efforts are to be successful, teachers will need staff development and in-service training experiences that will allow them to develop a knowledge base from which to develop and implement initiatives that are designed to encourage male involvement in their programs.

5. Train Female Facilitators To Accept Male Involvement

Although having male staff members provide leadership to initiatives designed to encourage male involvement in early childhood programs would be desirable, such expectations are not always realistic because the majority of professionals in this field are female. Women can be successful in these efforts, but they must acknowledge and build upon the unique strengths that men bring to the parenting realm and be sensitive to differences in the ways in which men and women approach parenting and interacting with young children.

6. Don't Neglect Mothers

Research has indicated that mothers tend to be the "gatekeepers" to their children for fathers or other significant male role figures. As educators develop initiatives to encourage male involvement, they must not do so at the expense of efforts targeted at mothers. Mothers need to be involved in the development of these efforts from the beginning. They need to be made aware of why resources are being put into developing these activities and how they and their children will benefit. Eliciting the support and involvement of mothers in developing such initiatives can help insure the initiatives' success.

7. Go Slowly

As with any other initiative, early childhood educators must proceed slowly in their efforts to encourage male involvement in their programs. The key to success for these efforts is in building a male-friendly environment that facilitates a culture of male involvement in the program. However, building such a culture is a long-term process, and educators shouldn't expect too much, too soon. They should start slowly and build upon their successes.

8. Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Many early childhood programs serving children who are at risk for later school failure already include comprehensive parent involvement components, although they tend to be targeted primarily at mothers. When developing initiatives for male involvement, educators should first evaluate the parent involvement components already in place and explore how they may be adapted to reach out to men in order to meet their unique needs.

Conclusion

Successful resolution of these issues will provide early childhood programs with a solid foundation from which to develop and implement parent involvement initiatives designed for men. Through such initiatives, men can become valuable resources as educators struggle to build stronger home-school partnerships aimed at strengthening family units that will help young children achieve success as they progress through the educational system.

For More Information

Epstein, J. L. (1988). How Do We Improve Programs for Parent Involvement? *Educational Horizons* 66(2): 58-59. EJ 364 521.

Epstein, J.L. (1992). School and Family Partnerships. In M.C. Alkin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (6th ed.) (pp. 1130-1151). New York: Macmillan.

Gary, L., L. Beatty, and G. Weaver. (1987). *Involvement of Black Fathers in Head Start*. (Final report submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services, ACYF, Grant No. 90-CD-0509). Washington, DC: Institute for Urban Affairs and Research, Howard University. ED 309 213.

Karweit, N. (1993). Effective Preschool and Kindergarten Programs for Students At-Risk. In B. Spodek (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children* (pp. 385-411). New York: Macmillan. ED 361 107.

Lamb, M.E. (in press). *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (3rd ed). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Levine, J.A. (1993). Involving Fathers in Head Start: A Framework for Public Policy and Program Development. *Families in Society*, 74(1): 4-19.

McBride, B.A., and H. Lin. (in press). Parental Involvement in Prekindergarten At-Risk Programs: Multiple Perspectives. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At-Risk*.

McBride, B.A., M. Obuchowski, and T. Rane. (1996). Father/Male Involvement in Prekindergarten At-Risk Programs: Research Guiding Practice. Workshop presented at the Family Resource Coalition Biennial Conference, Chicago, IL, May.

References identified with an ED (ERIC document) or EJ (ERIC journal) number are cited in the ERIC database. Most documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 900 locations worldwide, and can be ordered through EDRS: (800) 443-ERIC. Journal articles are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses such as: UMI (800) 732-0616; or ISI (800) 523-1850.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. DERR93002007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.